

Patent

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FOR

A DRIVER LAYOUT TO MINIMIZE GATE ORIENTATION RELATED
SKEW EFFECTS

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A DRIVER LAYOUT TO MINIMIZE GATE ORIENTATION RELATED SKEW EFFECTS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to integrated circuits, and more specifically,
5 to integrated circuit layout design.

BACKGROUND

As the frequency of VLSI circuits increases, the need to control skew in critical circuits becomes increasingly important. Two major process related components of skew are optical astigmatism and angle of implantation. Both of
10 these effects are sensitive to gate orientation.

Optical astigmatism can cause vertical and/or horizontal lines to be imaged onto a silicon wafer less accurately than normal. The accuracy of these critical dimensions (CDs) is fundamental but obviously some variance must be tolerated. Variance in the width and/or length of the intended transistor channel
15 dimensions ultimately affects the strength, β , (Eq. 1.4), i.e. the current carrying capability of the device (Eqs 1.2 & 1.3). This effect is becoming ever more dominant as CDs continue to approach photolithographical limits.

The second source of transistor driving strength modulation, albeit less dominant, is a result of a variance in the angle of implantation. This causes a
20 modulation of the device threshold voltage, V_t , resulting in a change in the effective driving strength of the device.

In the prior art, several methods have been used to control skew. Two of these are:

- use of long-channeled transistors
- 25 -- guaranteeing the same gate orientation of all critical circuits.

The use of long-channel transistors minimizes the effects of poly CD variance reducing the percentage change in L_{eff} (Eq. 1.6) caused by Δl . However, in order to achieve that same effective driving strength for the driver in question, the effective width, W_{eff} (Eq. 1.5) must be increased so that the β of the device is
5 equal to that of the minimum channel device. Long-channel drivers inherently consume more die area. For example, a 20% increase in L_{eff} requires a 20% increase in W_{eff} which translates to a 20% or more increase in silicon area required.

Figure 1A illustrates a driver circuit that may be implemented with the
10 various circuits described below. Figure 1B illustrates one layout of the driver of Figure 1A having a vertical orientation with parallel transistors. Figure 1C illustrates an alternative layout with parallel transistors having a horizontal orientation. The driver may alternatively be implemented as a single large device, as shown in Figure 1D. The device example shown has a W/L ratio of 12.
15 Figure 1E shows the horizontal embodiment of the single legged device. A vertical implementation may be done in the alternative.

Guaranteeing the same gate orientation for all critical transistors is another method of controlling skew. However, maintaining the same gate orientation is not always practical. For example, I/O cells are normally placed
20 radially to form the I/O ring of a design as shown in Figure 2. As can be seen, the same I/O library element is placed on both the top/bottom and left/right side of a die. Thus, the same gate orientation can not be maintained.

Therefore, an improved method of controlling skew would be advantageous.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A method and apparatus for a driver layout is described. The layout includes an first number of gate lines arranged along a first axis and a second equal number of gates arranged along a second axis, such that the first set of gates lines is orthogonal to the second set of gates lines. The layout includes a total of N discrete transistors.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention is illustrated by way of example, and not by way of limitation, in the figures of the accompanying drawings and in which like reference numerals refer to similar elements and in which:

5 Figure 1A is a circuit diagram of a driver circuit.

Figure 1B-1E are circuit diagrams and layouts of prior art transistors.

Figure 2 is a layout of a prior art I/O ring design.

Figure 3A-C are one embodiment of layouts of circuits according to one embodiment of the present invention.

10 Figure 4 is a layout illustrating optical astigmatism.

Figures 5A-8C illustrate one embodiment of step-by-step manufacturing of the driver circuit of Figure 3.

Figure 9 illustrates one embodiment of a diffusion plate that may be used to create the diffusion areas shown in Figure 7A.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

A circuit layout to minimize gate orientation related skew effects is described. This layout, for a driver with N gates, orients N/2 gates horizontally and N/2 vertically to reduce skew in integrated circuits. This is fundamentally different from selecting specific gate orientation for skew sensitive circuits on a die. For one embodiment, this driver can be referred to as a T4 driver, for tic-tac-toe Transistor layout.

The T4 driver minimizes skew by reducing the overall range of drain current, I_{ds} , resulting from optical astigmatism variances. All other process parameters being equal, i.e. $\mu E/t_{ox}$ constant, the skew of driver strength can be directly controlled by minimizing the range of β .

For simplicity sake, the following set of equations discussed vertical and horizontal astigmatism effects separately. If it can be shown that $\beta_{current}$ is in the middle of possible values for both single and multi-legged device oriented either vertically or horizontally, then the T4 layout provides a circuit less sensitive to gate orientation skew effects. The T4 driver minimizes skew due to optical astigmatism -- defined in the background section -- by reducing the minimum and maximum ranges of the transistor. The discussion below, for simplicity addresses the structure of a N-type metal oxide semiconductors (NMOS).

The basic MOS transistor equations for I_{ds} , the drain to source current for a transistor, are:

$$(1.1) \quad I_{ds} = 0$$

$$V_{gs} \leq V_t \text{ (cutoff)}$$

$$(1.2) \quad I_{ds} = \beta * \left[(V_{gs} - V_t) V_{ds} - \frac{V_{ds}^2}{2} \right]$$

$$0 < V_{ds} < V_{gs} - V_t \text{ (non-saturation)}$$

$$(1.3) \quad I_{ds} = \beta * \left[\frac{(V_{gs} - V_t)^2}{2} \right] \quad 0 < V_{gs} - V_t < V_{ds} \text{ (saturation)}$$

Where

V_{gs} is the gate to source voltage,

V_t is the device threshold voltage,

5 V_{ds} is the drain to source voltage, and

β is the transistor gain factor, such that

$$(1.4) \quad \beta = \frac{\mu\epsilon}{t_{ox}} * \left[\frac{W_{eff}}{L_{eff}} \right], \text{ where}$$

$\frac{\mu\epsilon}{t_{ox}}$ is the process dependent factor, where

10 μ is the effective surface mobility of carriers (electrons or holes),

ϵ is the permittivity of the gate insulator,

t_{ox} is the thickness of the gate insulator,

W_{eff} is the effective width of the channel, and

L_{eff} is the effective length of the channel

15 such that

$$(1.5) \quad W_{eff} = W \pm \Delta w$$

$$(1.6) \quad L_{eff} = L \pm \Delta l, \text{ where}$$

Δw is the diffusion critical dimension variance, and

Δl is the poly critical dimension variance

20 Based on these equations, the transistor gain factor can be calculated for various circuit types. For one embodiment, for this calculation it can be assumed

that the process dependent factor is a constant, k . Thus, for the circuits described in Figure 1D, a single legged circuit, the value of β is

$$(2.1) \beta_{1t} = k \left[\frac{12W \pm \Delta w}{L \mp \Delta} \right],$$

while for the twelve parallel legged circuit shown in Figure 1B, the value
5 of β is

$$(2.2) \beta_{12t} = k \left[\frac{12(W \pm \Delta w)}{L \mp \Delta} \right].$$

The value of β for the circuit described below in Figure 3 is

$$(2.3) \beta_{\text{current}} = k \left[\frac{6(W \pm \Delta w)}{L \mp \Delta l} + \frac{6(W \mp \Delta w)}{L \pm \Delta l} \right], \text{ since half of the transistors are}$$

horizontally oriented, while the other half of the transistors are vertically
10 oriented.

Four specific examples are described below with respect to Figure 4, illustrating two types of astigmatism, vertical and horizontal. Optical astigmatism can cause vertical and/or horizontal lines to be imaged onto a silicon wafer less accurately than normal.

15 Case I(a) – vertical astigmatism, along axis x and y , $\Delta x > 0$, $\Delta y = 0$. For this example, for simplicity, the process dependent factors are assumed to be constant and are not shown. In this case,

$$\beta_{h1t} = \left[\frac{12W + \Delta x}{L + \Delta y} \right] = \frac{12W + \Delta x}{L}, \quad \beta_{v1t} = \left[\frac{12W + \Delta y}{L + \Delta x} \right] = \frac{12W}{L + \Delta x}$$

$$\beta_{h12t} = \left[\frac{12(W + \Delta x)}{L + \Delta y} \right] = \frac{12W + 12\Delta x}{L}, \quad \beta_{v12t} = \left[\frac{12(W + \Delta y)}{L + \Delta x} \right] = \frac{12W}{L + \Delta x}$$

$$20 \quad \beta_{\text{current}} = \left[\frac{6(W + \Delta x)}{L + \Delta y} + \frac{6(W + \Delta y)}{L + \Delta x} \right] = \left[\frac{6W + 6\Delta x}{L} + \frac{6W}{L + \Delta x} \right]$$

thus,

$\beta_{v12t} = \beta_{v1t} < \beta_{current} < \beta_{h1t} < \beta_{h12t}$, similarly, it can be proven that for Case I(b), where $\Delta x < 0, \Delta y = 0$,

$\beta_{h12t} < \beta_{h1t} < \beta_{current} < \beta_{v1t} = \beta_{v12t}$. Thus it appears that $\beta_{current}$, having an equal number of transistors oriented horizontally and vertically is less sensitive to vertical astigmatism than either of the two prior art methods.

Similarly, for Case II(a), horizontal astigmatism, where $\Delta x = 0, \Delta y > 0$,

$$\beta_{h1t} = \left[\frac{12W + \Delta x}{L + \Delta y} \right] = \frac{12W}{L + \Delta y}, \quad \beta_{v1t} = \left[\frac{12W + \Delta y}{L + \Delta x} \right] = \frac{12W + \Delta y}{L}$$

$$\beta_{h12t} = \left[\frac{12(W + \Delta x)}{L + \Delta y} \right] = \frac{12W}{L + \Delta y}, \quad \beta_{v12t} = \left[\frac{12(W + \Delta y)}{L + \Delta x} \right] = \frac{12W + 12(\Delta y)}{L}$$

$$\beta_{current} = \left[\frac{6(W + \Delta x)}{L + \Delta y} + \frac{6(W + \Delta y)}{L + \Delta x} \right] = \left[\frac{6W}{L + \Delta y} + \frac{6W + 6(\Delta y)}{L} \right]$$

thus,

$\beta_{h12t} = \beta_{h1t} < \beta_{current} < \beta_{v1t} < \beta_{v12t}$, similarly, it can be proven that for Case II(b), where $\Delta x = 0, \Delta y < 0$,

$\beta_{v12t} < \beta_{v1t} < \beta_{current} < \beta_{h1t} = \beta_{h12t}$. Thus it appears that $\beta_{current}$, having an equal number of transistors oriented horizontally and vertically is less sensitive to horizontal astigmatism than either of the two prior art methods.

Astigmatism may have both horizontal and vertical aspects. Since $\beta_{current}$ is less sensitive to horizontal astigmatism, and $\beta_{current}$ is less sensitive to vertical astigmatism, therefore $\beta_{current}$ is less sensitive to a combined horizontal and vertical astigmatism.

For one embodiment, this structure, which is a fundamental building block, can be stepped and repeat in both X and Y directions to create stronger

drivers. The basic twelve transistor structure shown in Figure 3A below can be permuted by removing an even number of transistor legs to create other structures. For example T9-T12 may be removed to create an O-ring device, as shown in Figure 3B. A single pair of legs may also be used to generate four
5 transistors, as shown in Figure 3C. Any even number of transistors may be set in this structure, such that half of the transistors are orthogonal to the other half of the transistors. By using such a layout of transistors, skew effects are minimized.

Common library elements which can not be placed to guarantee the same orientation for a specific gate, e.g. I/O cells for bond-wire designs, can use this
10 layout method to eliminate gate orientation skew.

The T4 driver can also reduce the modulations in threshold voltage, V_t , resulting from implant angle variations which can arise between orthogonally oriented transistors. It can be seen in both the saturated and non-saturated current equations, that variations in V_t will cause variations in driver current.
15 These V_t variations also skew the behavior of the driver and minimizing these is beneficial to controlling overall circuit skew. Keeping the gate orientation of $N/2$ transistors orthogonal to the other half of transistors, forces all T4 driver configuration to experience that same set of variations. In much the same way as with optical astigmatism, this minimizes the magnitude of V_t variance.

Figure 3A illustrates an exemplary layout of a T4 driver. The driver includes twelve transistors T1 to T12 390 arranged symmetrically along four legs 310-325. The legs 310-325 are arranged in a bilaterally symmetric format. The legs 310-325 form the gates of transistors T1 340 to T12 395. For one
25 embodiment, the legs 310-325 are polysilicon. Alternatively, the legs 310-325 may be metal, or another conductive material. The legs 310-325 are placed on a

substrate (not shown). The substrate includes source 330 and drain sections 340, in an alternating pattern. Thus, for example, all corners and the center section may be source sections 330, while the other sections are drain sections 340.

5 Around each crossing of the legs 310-320 is a non-diffused area 350. The interconnections between the sources are not shown. For one embodiment, the sources may be tied together and the drains may be tied together, using metal layers.

Thus, for example, one transistor, T1 360, is circled, including a portion of leg 310 and adjacent source 330 and drain 340 areas. Transistor T1 360 shares a
10 source with transistor T8, and a drain with transistor T2. The gate area of the transistor T1 360 is defined by the edge of the structure and the non-diffused area 350. Figures 3B and 3C illustrate permutations of this design, with fewer numbers of transistors. Similarly, additional transistors may be added to the system, while balancing the number of transistors

15 Figure 4 is a layout illustrating optical astigmatism. For simplicity, the system is described as being horizontally oriented, such that the diffusion area extends horizontally. The first figure shows a vertical astigmatism, where $\Delta y > 0$, and $\Delta x = 0$. The second figure shows horizontal astigmatism, where $\Delta x > 0$, and $\Delta y = 0$. Of course, astigmatism may involve both an x and a y component, but this
20 is not shown in Figure 4.

Figures 5A-C illustrate top, side, and perspective views of the substrate on which a transistor layout according to the present invention may be implemented. For one embodiment, the substrate is a silicon substrate. Alternatively, ceramics, sapphire, or other materials may be used for the
25 substrate.

Figures 6A-C illustrate top, side, and perspective views of the substrate after a first layer of a conductor 510 has been deposited. This conductor 510 forms the gate for the transistor. For one embodiment, the stage shown at Figures 6A-C is achieved by a two step process, initially depositing a layer of conductor 510, and then etching away the material 510. For one embodiment, a layer of silicon dioxide (SiO_2) 515 is deposited on the substrate prior to the conductor 510 deposition. For another embodiment, another material may be used in place of the silicon dioxide. This SiO_2 layer 515 is removed with the conductive layer 510, leaving a layer of SiO_2 layer 515 underneath the conductor layer 510. For one embodiment, the conductor 510 is a metal layer. For another embodiment, the conductor 510 is a polysilicon layer. Alternative materials may be used.

Figures 7A-C illustrate top, side, and perspective views of the substrate after a diffusion step. The diffusion step creates the source and drain regions 520. For one embodiment, the step further dopes the gate 510. The diffusion step creates non-diffused areas 525, centered around the intersection of gates 510. Figure 9 illustrates a diffusion plate 910 that may be used to create the diffusion areas shown in Figure 7C. With this step a complete transistor is formed, with the gate area 515 surrounded on either side by a source 530 and drain 540 contact.

Figures 8A-C illustrate top, side, and perspective views of the substrate after contact windows are established. The contact windows 530, 540 permit the transistor to be hooked up to other devices. This figure does not show the interconnections between the source and drain contacts of each transistor.

However, by interconnecting the source and drain areas appropriately, various circuits may be created.

In this way, a symmetric set of drivers is manufactured, with transistors in both directions.

5 In the foregoing specification, the invention has been described with reference to specific exemplary embodiments thereof. It will, however, be evident that various modifications and changes may be made thereto without departing from the broader spirit and scope of the invention as set forth in the appended claims. The specification and drawings are, accordingly, to be
10 regarded in an illustrative rather than a restrictive sense.